

# Integration: dirty word or golden key?

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**ABSTRACT** This article examines the notion of integrated studies as a way of organising curriculum in schools. Drawing on the insights of educational philosophy, curriculum theory and learning theory it establishes the soundness of a theoretical case for integration. It examines what this view means for the art and science of teaching, and notes examples of successful integration in schools. The paper identifies the roots of integrated studies in the thinking of the Plowden Report and suggests that the approach is equally valid today.

## **Purpose**

Plowden (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) made an important assertion which was later blamed (erroneously, if theorists like Eisner [1996] and practitioners like Campbell & Kerry [2004] are right) for a diminution in children's knowledge. It was this:

Throughout our discussion of curriculum ... we stress that children's learning does not fit into subject categories. (para. 555)

Throughout a long career in education I have been convinced that this assertion is not only correct but that it applies equally to effective learning in any context; and Clyde (1995, p. 115) talks of children's learning as: 'An interpretive network which spreads across domains'.

This article intends to provide a rationale and some conceptual underpinning for this belief in order that like-minded educators in any context may be able to justify their approach on the basis of the best elements in educational thought. It then goes on to explore the implications of integrated content in education.

## **Introduction**

At the heart of the problem lies what is learned and how it is learned – for convenience I shall talk about learning in schools, but the context is easily widened by the reader. The root question is: should learning be divided into

segments known as 'subjects', or would it be better and more effectively acquired in some more homogeneous form?

Answering this question is difficult not because the answer is obscure but simply because a complete answer has many strands. Within the compass of this article I will attempt to deal, albeit cursorily, with just four of them. If the answer is difficult it is because it defies convention (and people, even teachers, fear change) and because that convention itself supports a structure of vested interests.

The four strands that I will deal with, in turn, are these:

- the supposed reality of 'subject disciplines';
- theories and models of curriculum;
- theories and models of learning;
- models of teaching that underpin integrated studies.

### **The Supposed Reality of 'Subject Disciplines'**

Why do some educators oppose the use of integrated approaches to learning in schools? Generally, the answer rests less with integration, and more with convictions about how knowledge is constructed. The conventional argument goes something like that paraphrased below:

Knowledge falls naturally into 'domains' called subjects which are bounded by specific kinds of conceptual thinking, specific ways of constructing knowledge that fit the content of the subject, and by procedures that are specific to that content.

This view, or something approximating to it, has become embedded into educational practice and to depart from it requires a kind of intellectual conversion. But how accurate is it?

The problem is best explored through an example. Physics is a 'subject discipline' in conventional thought. So what makes a physicist distinctive compared with a chemist or a theologian? First he (or, of course throughout, she) will have a content knowledge that is bounded by 'how the world works', the laws of the universe – at a simple level, the characteristics that define how electric current flows. Our physicist will have a scientific or positivist approach to problem solving: hypothesising, testing and observation, drawing conclusions, constructing a theory or law – and a multiplicity of these last will provide a conceptual view of the universe. Then he will use particular conventions to record and communicate his discoveries and other information (symbols, formulae and so on).

So far, so good; every pupil has experienced this. So then our pupil moves on to a chemistry lesson. What changes? Well not the scientific process and underpinning. Nor the use of particular conventions to record discoveries and information, even though the actual symbols and language may be slightly different – volts and forces may be replaced by valency and states of matter. What has changed fundamentally is not the approach to knowledge but the

content of the lesson: the difference between physics and chemistry is in large measure down to content; what is learned not how it is learned.

But (the reader may be thinking) this example is a poor one because we are comparing two closely allied 'subjects'. Fine; then select theology instead of chemistry. Theologians have specific subject knowledge (systems, sacred books, rituals); but they too 'solve problems' such as ethical hypotheses, based on observations (of human and divine acts), collect evidence (of good and evil), draw conclusions (moral codes) and speak in symbols (Allah, sacraments). All that has really changed is the content of their studies, not the epistemology that underpins them.

Then, all three of our 'subject specialists' find themselves in higher education, and behold! Each is trying to offer a rationale for the universe, an explanation for human and material events, and ideas about how people should live within the contexts of the physical, chemical or spiritual universe and even how their own subjects 'work'. They all become philosophers.

Their answers and starting points may be different but they are bounded by the same concerns, the same need to establish conceptual structures, the same need to communicate knowledge, and the same requirements to invent symbols and laws to make sense of the universe. Their perspectives may be conditioned more or less by their content-concerns, but their knowledge operates quite similarly and to quite similar ends. What distinguishes 'subjects' is not, at root, their 'distinctive disciplines' but rather their 'distinctive content' – and even then that content is directed to similar core purposes.

Furthermore, while the physicist, the chemist and the theologian may each have a content-led distinctive contribution to make to human insight, each insight alone is partial, potentially blinkered, and ultimately unsatisfying. Only by drawing all the insights – and others – together can the jigsaw of human life and the universe ever be more than a relatively random and incomplete corner of the real puzzle.

Let us advance the argument one stage further and ask: what of the 'new' subjects so reviled by traditionalists – media studies, film studies, American studies, sports studies and so on? Are these 'subject disciplines' in a traditional sense, or are they indeed intellectually undemanding hotchpotches as their detractors claim? In trying to answer this question I have taken arguments as they commonly emerge in the education press or in discussion.

If we take media studies as an example of a 'new' subject, then typically one suspects that it involves its own conceptual structures (e.g. understanding how various media influence the public, principles for judging the validity of information, etc.), its own ways to construct knowledge (drawing perhaps on areas like the psychology of perception or the sociology of communication), and its own languages and symbolism (such as headline writing or picture editing). In other words, these new subjects are really just like old subjects except that the content that underlies them is specific to their own area of knowledge and expertise. So we are back to content as the distinguishing feature. Our conclusion is that there are not, as it were, a limited number of pre-

existent subject disciplines 'out there' that impose concepts, symbols and procedural processes on their students; we impose those on the material studied. Subjects impose on students only the content that defines them: a piece of knowledge either is, or is not, psychology, or astrophysics, or music. Even that content is to some extent fluid: today's knowledge in media studies is tomorrow's history curriculum.

If this is a fair portrayal, then we have to ask why the 'subject discipline' approach has lingered so long in educational institutions. There are probably a number of reasons (which would each require a longer study than is possible here), so let us merely suggest some indicators. The first is historical: the 'old' subjects, often invented by 'traditional' universities, existed first and so claimed some form of 'precedence'; but actually, if subject disciplines are traced back far enough only three or four could trace their roots any distance. In the genuinely 'old' universities a would-be graduate had first to achieve his degree in arts (a generalism) before he could proceed to the higher (in the view of the time) 'subject disciplines' such as theology and medicine. But in this context 'disciplines' such as geography, history, Spanish and so on would have been considered *avant-garde*.

Other reasons are just as illogical and even more pragmatic. School-promoted posts are usually linked to subjects, and to be a generalist (at least in a post-primary context) is a career disadvantage. People feel more secure if they can label themselves: how often do you hear teachers, on first introduction, announce for example 'I'm a historian' and, since school timetables are subject based, so parallel pigeon-holing of people is convenient. Then there is the simple fear of change: we've always done it this way. And there is arrogance: to be a physicist provides more kudos than to be a geographer or an economist (the argument is circular: it must do, because the promoted post is worth more). In these ways, the vested interests of subject specialists are served, and to adopt another epistemological approach is to abandon one's advantage and launch into a sea of change that both demands thought, and provokes insecurity about personal worth.

Antagonists towards interdisciplinary approaches often call on educational philosophers to help them establish a case for discrete 'disciplines', especially the work of Hirst (1974). However, this approach is not entirely helpful. Hirst did not establish the discrete nature of 'subjects' in the traditional sense, but of 'forms of knowledge' which he listed as: pure mathematics and logic, empirical sciences, history and human sciences, aesthetics, morals, philosophy, and religion. This list is rather different from a conventional school timetable list consisting of areas like biology, French, IT, geography and so on. To qualify as a 'form', the knowledge had to be subject to demonstration as to truth (itself a debatable proposition); but also had to contain key notions or concepts specific to that form of knowing. Thus, while Hirst's classification of forms of knowledge does attempt to define the limits of those forms, the forms are nonetheless far broader than traditional 'subjects'. Nor have we integrationists ruled out the existence of concepts, rules, laws or symbols peculiar to certain

areas of knowledge; we have simply pointed out that all subjects share the existence of such (albeit different) codes and procedures, while what they don't share is the subject content. Once again, the key discriminator is content.

In this context, a productive approach was adopted by Lawton (1997), who proposed four principles of change away from content-led curriculum (including specifically the National Curriculum), which were:

- replacing the thrust of content and objectives with a concern for skills and processes;
- moving from subjects and attainment to cross-curricular themes and the affective domain;
- shifting the emphasis from didactic teaching to self-directed learning;
- moving from the academic/vocational divide to integration of both aspects.

Lawton, wisely it is suggested, concludes that 'subjects may be useful up to a point' but that 'more pressing [human] problems are not conveniently packaged within a single subject', so there is a need to move 'beyond subjects' (1997, p. 85). Let it be said that the Plowden Report allows for the coexistence of subjects within and alongside thematic approaches (chapter 17 *passim*).

So it is important to say one more thing about this argument. It should not be construed as in any way devaluing the worth of any area of knowledge, its content or forms of thinking. Insight, understanding and problem solving can be advanced either by sharing thinking and factual information across areas of knowledge, or by pushing back boundaries in some more closely defined corner of learning. Each has its place and its validity. This approach promotes the worth of knowledge as a whole, rather than seeking competition between different forms of knowledge.

### Theories and Models of Curriculum

But if subject disciplines are redefined as relating more to discrete areas of content than to separate and ring-fenced forms of knowing, then adopting Plowden's vision of integrated approaches to learning becomes far more respectable and attainable. Indeed, this redefinition forces educational planners not to construct a syllabus based on areas of knowledge per se (the very trap into which the National Curriculum fell, it is suggested) but to construct a curriculum on the basis of what pupils and society need: to begin not from content but from the learner – the first pillar of Plowden (para. 9): 'at the heart of the educational process lies the child'.

I will not rehearse Plowden's arguments (see paras 508-555), but simply summarise a few modern views about curriculum that support and sustain the Report's position, and provide some examples of such curricula at work to establish their feasibility and effectiveness.

Eisner (1996), in conclusions not entirely removed from Hirst's, considers curriculum to consist of 'forms of representation': auditory, kinaesthetic, tactile, olfactory, visual and gustatory – which are manifested in art, music, speech,

drama, text, mathematics and so on. These forms of representation require an affective context based in social learning and in society. He urges that knowledge ('content' is the label used above) can be understood and appreciated from a variety of perspectives; but that if pupils believe, say, that a 'text possesses a single correct meaning' they will seek only that meaning and will fail to look for other meanings. This attitude, he says, does 'little to promote intellectual values ... multiple perspectives ... judgement, risk-taking, speculation and interpretation' (1996, p. 71). The result of such a paucity of approach is that so-called learning becomes confined to factual material, to what is testable in simplistic ways, and to phenomena such as league tables of achievement that reflect only a fraction of potential intellectual activity – phenomena that resonate with today's educational practices.

In a related critique, Ross (2000, pp. 81, 82) sets out a social transformative theory of curriculum in which 'each individual gets the opportunity to ... come into a living contact with a broader environment' and to gain 'knowledge as something constructed by the learner as an active experimenter, provoked into enquiry by the teacher'. This theory takes us to a third Plowden principle: that of 'discovery' (para. 549), in contrast with subject-based and content-driven didactic approaches.

Ross also identifies other metaphors for studying curriculum, among which is his metaphor of the 'natural landscaped curriculum'. In this, 'subjects are ... highly artificial, dividing forms of knowledge with contrived distinctions ... of process, knowledge and procedure'. Plowden had pre-dated this view with the assertion (para. 521) that 'learning takes place through a continuous process of interaction between the learner and the environment'. The Report's basic stance on the integration of curriculum is supported by modern writers such as Stenhouse (1975), Elliott (1998) and Kelly (1999). Indeed, this brief review leads one to ask whether learning would be subdivided at all, into subject disciplines or otherwise, if it were not for the bureaucratic straitjacket of schooling and timetabling.

Both Eisner and Kelly challenge the exam culture of modern education systems, identifying the failure of content-led teaching in even achieving the declared purpose of communicating the content itself (Kelly, 2001), and pointing out the cultures of blame for pupils' failures that are generated among teachers by politicians. The Plowden Report warned against over-prescription (para. 539) of curriculum by individual schools; since that time we have seen prescription by government, championed by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and measured by a variety of closed approaches – a far worse scenario than Plowden could have envisaged. Carr (2003, p. 146) challenges the governmental approach strongly:

Any philosophy of education that models educational development on the pattern of uniform initiation into a pre-specified range of forms of knowledge and understanding may be dangerously procrustean.

Later, we shall see that it is not only curriculum theorists who find the Plowden vision liberating, feasible and preferable, but also many influential learning theorists concur. But for the moment the point is made, and it is opportune to ask whether an integrated curriculum can work even in the inimical context of today's education system. In a recent article, Campbell & Kerry (2004) described the construction and implementation of a form of integrated curriculum at Key Stage 3 (KS3, ages 11-14 years). Not only was the KS3 curriculum remodelled on these lines, but pupils were accelerated through it, taking the appropriate (subject-based) Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) a year early. In the first year of operation, therefore, two cohorts of pupils were tested simultaneously, one having moved through to KS3 SATs following conventional studies over three years and one having studied the more integrated curriculum in just two. The results were outstanding, the outcomes of the two cohorts almost identical, and that in one of the country's highest performing schools.

In another article (Kerry, 2005) a further example was outlined of a comprehensive school which was planning to revert from heavily subject-orientated teaching back to integrated approaches. Cryer School's problem related to providing adequate post-16 opportunities for its academic and less academic pupils; and the solution was seen in a re-examination of both curriculum and learning/teaching methods. Rather less surprisingly, perhaps, the same article describes a similar reversion to integrated approaches in a primary school, Quinnan School; the views of a number of heads are reported to the effect that: 'Curriculum has to be more pupil-centred, more integrated, and more demanding' (i.e. than the National Curriculum) (p. 17).

However, the article also notes a head teacher's view that, for a cohort of teachers trained post-National Curriculum:

Most ... know how to access lesson notes from the Internet, but they can't devise material for themselves, from the ground up. They don't understand how to lead pupils into high levels of thought because they're fixated on the content. They need some basic help in structuring learning cognitively, and they need teaching skills to draw pupils' thinking out. (Kerry, 2005, p. 17)

This, apparently, is the professional legacy of a generation of educational planners who poured scorn on the Plowden Report. However, Carr (2003, p. 15) would chide us to define our terms, drawing a distinction between the narrow purposes of schooling (which might include content acquisition for its own sake) and education (which implies that pupils acquire 'an understanding of themselves, the world and their relations with others that enables autonomous recognition and pursuit for their own sake of interests and projects of intrinsic satisfaction').

### **So How Can One Sum up the Argument of This Article So Far?**

First, an attempt has been made to establish that the notion of subject disciplines, if not actually spurious, has at least been overplayed and too restrictively applied in the English education system. Motivation for adhering to this epistemology has been related more to self-interest or convenience, with strong underlying issues of pragmatism, rather than to reality. Second, curriculum theorists in a respectable line from Rousseau to Ross have espoused the cause of integration. Third, it has been demonstrated that integrated curricula work in practice in both secondary and primary schools. Finally, it is suggested that these curricula avoid the worst pitfalls of the National Curriculum (NC) and testing system: limited tests of content learning reduced to league tables which are decontextualised to make judgements about schools. But, to do justice to the cause of integration one has to move on two more steps in analysing how best it can be implemented; and first to examine the place of integrated learning in learning theory.

### **Theories and Models of Learning**

It would be wrong to assume that Plowden represents a merely dated view of the nature of learning; it makes a genuine effort to review contemporary and progressive theories. The Report also anticipates one of the latest and most popular learning theories among modern teachers: Gardner's multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999). Gardner's list of intelligences will rapidly be seen to relate to Eisner's theories about how to classify curriculum. Gardner's learning categories are: linguistic/verbal, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, kinaesthetic, musical, naturalist, interpersonal and intra-personal. First, let it be said that this contiguity between curriculum and learning theories is important if one is to construct a sound approach to pupils' educational experiences, and it is exemplified in the Brooke Weston KS3 curriculum innovation outlined above. There, Campbell & Kerry (2004) describe the new curriculum as underpinned by CELTIC approaches and socially valuable themes (see Campbell & Kerry, 2004, pp. 392-396 for a definition of CELTIC). Jarvis, while posing some critical reservations about multiple intelligences, quotes Kornhaber:

The theory validates educators' everyday experience: students think and learn in many different ways. It also provides educators with a conceptual framework for organising and reflecting on curriculum, assessment and pedagogical practices. (Jarvis, 2005, pp. 53, 54)

This link between learning theory and curriculum design is an important one: indeed it was one drawn to teachers' attention in Kerry (1988), where reflections on learning effectiveness led to the design of a tentative integrated curriculum for able children in schools based on themes rather than subjects (these included scientific studies, literature, aesthetics, thinking skills, technology and computer studies, cultural studies, life skills and languages). By

contrast, the traditional approach – and that of the NC – began from subject disciplines and projected them onto the learner. Plowden adopted an opposite view and began from the learner. Seen from this end of the telescope the learning picture looks different. This was a conclusion born out of my own empirical research in the 1980s which has been, I believe, under-exploited.

Research which was carried out between 1976 and 1981 (for the Department of Education and Science's Teacher Education Project, directed by the late Professor Ted Wragg and managed by the author) explored classroom learning from the perspective of cognitive demand. My work took the Bloomian (Bloom, 1956) categories of cognition (slightly redefined for fieldwork purposes) and explored how much cognitive demand was made by teachers on pupils during lessons through verbal interactions and in the tasks they set in class and for homework. These studies were carried out initially in what are now Year 7 (Y7) classes (12 year-olds); the idea was later extended to compare the findings with those in primary schools, and with similar research among older students. The findings were published in a range of journals, but the broad picture is captured in my chapters in Wragg (1984), since reprinted many times. Here only the bare bones of the argument need to be rehearsed.

In the original research teachers' talk, teachers' questions and classroom tasks set in Y7 classes were assessed for cognitive demand using an adapted Bloomian scale which allowed an overall measure of how many teacher inputs/questions/tasks in a lesson were at a higher level of cognitive demand and how many at a low level (and also, the nature of the higher level demands, but these need not detain us for the present purpose). A very broad conclusion from the wealth of analysis was that less than 5% of all verbal transactions and less than 15% of tasks were at a higher level. In fact, verbal transactions related to class control occupied between 14.5% and 29.4% of all transactions in the studied schools – much more frequent than higher order learning activity. This does not bode well for learning.

Within the data it was possible to compare results across subjects, and one of the most surprising and interesting outcomes related to the tasks set in lessons across the schools in the initial study (Table I). Here it can be seen that English and science perform relatively well, but other subjects tail off with even mathematics performing rather poorly. But, as luck would have it, the organisation of these Y7 classes meant that in some schools there was an element of the timetable taught as integrated studies. In integrated studies lessons, the higher order task-demand rose on average to 41%. In other words, learning was deeper and more effective in lessons where subject content was integrated than in lessons where it was organised simply by subject discipline. So, one might hypothesise, not only is it logically preferable according to the principles of curriculum and learning theory to integrate lesson content, it is actually more effective in producing cognitive outcomes.

Two other findings reinforced the stated conclusion. The first was that in an accelerated examination group (current Y10) cognitive demand actually fell, because the lesson transactions were related only to the acquisition of content in

order to address examination questions. The other was that, when the measures were applied to primary classrooms where work was, without exception, integrated, these lessons scored consistently higher in cognitive demand on pupils than did subject-discipline lessons overall in secondary schools. The clear message from all this research appeared to be: if you want pupils to think, integrate.

Subject	%
English	33.3
Science	23.0
History	11.5
French	11.3
Maths	8.9
Music	6.7
Religious Education	5.0
Geography	4.2

Table I. The levels of higher order cognitive demand in classroom tasks, by subject, in Teacher Education Project research.

These findings might have been the subject of more research and have resulted in a more widespread adoption of integrated learning but for an unfortunate confluence of factors. The project came to the end of its funded life and so the original team split up (though both Wragg and I continued to make similar informal small-scale measurements, with similar outcomes). No other researchers took up and exploited these indicative findings. The Department of Education and Science itself was in a period of change. Not long afterwards the National Curriculum was initiated with its bias towards subject disciplines. Interestingly, this had a negative effect in another, unintentional, way, too. An early version of the assessment of the NC by teachers required them to record pupil achievement using a kind of Bloomian system. But the system was bastardised, poorly explained, with teachers untrained in its use, and recording was cumbersome. So this potentially useful approach was quickly abandoned in favour of easier solutions that were administratively less hassle – even if somewhat lacking in meaning.

What, however, is clear is that not only are narrow subject disciplines not a necessary part of how knowledge is constructed, school curriculum can be built on a sound body of theory about curriculum and learning that supports an integrated approach. Furthermore, in pedagogical terms, there is research evidence that integration ‘works’, that it produces good learning and perhaps superior learning. So what are the implications for teachers and teaching?

## Models of Teaching that Underpin Integrated Studies

If we are to move beyond functionality (how much revenue is required to teach ring-fenced content to a given level of acquisition) into a holistic view of curriculum as an approach to the self-development of the learner, then we place not less, but more, onus on effective teaching. In turn, that teaching has to be redefined. Teaching an integrated curriculum that makes the place of the learner central, rather than the place of content, requires a different kind of approach to teaching in order to be effective. Overall, didactic approaches won't do, though at times they may have a place.

Though Ofsted has always denied that it favoured didactic teaching, a former Chief Inspector has made it clear that such was his own position (Woodhead, 1995), more recently calling articles like this one 'pernicious' (Woodhead, 2002). Indeed, alternatives to didactic teaching are illogical within a subject-restricted, content-led curriculum; and it was Woodhead who helped establish that curriculum, even though in his 2002 speech he rejected it as ineffectual! For, if the NC is espoused, it ought to be admitted at the same time that schooling has ceased to be education and has become training. (A parallel process took place in teacher education during the same period.)

The Plowden Report (para. 503) identified a series of 'danger signs' to indicate when effective teaching had collapsed, a list which reads today almost like an indictment of the NC. In a study of the learning of able pupils after NC implementation, Kerry & Kerry (2000, p. 38) were given a very similar list of NC failures by teachers. Table II puts these lists side by side in what is a very telling juxtaposition.

Plowden's 'danger signs'	Teachers' views of NC
Fragmented knowledge	Prescriptive content
Limited creative work	Lack of creativity
Much time spent on teaching (as opposed to learning)	Restricted teacher initiative in curriculum and teaching
Few questions from the children	Compartmented thinking
Too many exercises	Failures of pace and level
Straitjacketed learning	Narrowed expectations
Concentration on tests	

Table II. Comparison of Plowden's indicators of failing lessons with teachers' views of National Curriculum.

Plowden, however, is aware that the teaching required by an integrated curriculum cannot be less well executed than that of didactic approaches. Paras 549-552 assert that words like 'discovery' cannot be used lightly, that teachers must bring to their teaching 'astringent intellectual scrutiny', that the progress of pupils must be assessed and monitored (in appropriate manners), and that the quality of individual schools must be kept under review. None of this smacks of

the 'nambyism' and woolly thinking attributed to Plowden by its detractors, for example Grossen (1998).

So, given that the Plowden vision of curriculum and of learning is accepted, what are the actual implications for teachers and models of teaching? I would suggest that teaching, while not an easy process, is essentially a simple one. By that is meant that the agenda for teaching skills is clear, even if the skills themselves require to be learned, constantly reflected upon, honed and improved. The complexities of this process of teaching, and of understanding it, are summarised by Bennett (1997, pp. 139-140). To teach an integrated curriculum effectively (in fact, to teach anything effectively) there are some basic essentials in the teacher's armoury, and these can be seen as areas of teaching skill:

- skills in class management;
- skills in explaining;
- skills in questioning;
- skills in task setting and differentiation; and increasingly,
- skills in assessment.

Within the scope of a short article such as this, it is impossible even to outline these skills, but they can be accessed readily in other published work (Kerry, 2002a, b; Kerry & Wilding, 2004). These skills represent the agenda for teaching competence, and should be high on the priority list of all teacher education establishments. This is not to say that other skills do not exist or are unimportant, but simply to state that these are fundamental – the building blocks of all other classroom teaching and learning. At present, not enough time is spent on them, and too few teachers have genuine command of them. This list evolved from the Teacher Education Project, mentioned above, but is slightly extended over the original version; the skills are not plucked out of the air but based on research and grounded theory. However, many teachers will warm to the version of these events recounted inimitably by Wragg (1984, p. 8):

The areas on which we chose to focus, class-management, mixed ability teaching, questioning and explaining, seemed ... to represent activities which required skill, intelligence and sensitivity from teachers. They were not so vague as to defy analysis, nor so minute and piddling as to be silly.

It is heartening to discover, as reported earlier, that many schools are now reconsidering curriculum approaches and are tending to move closer to an integrated approach with a renewed interest in pupil learning. But it is important to stress the need to move in parallel to make teachers' activities and teaching appropriate to the new curriculum and learning intentions. Indeed, where this does not happen, any experimentation may prove at best ineffectual and at worst disastrous; Kerry & Wilding (2004, pp. 259-280) reported just such a case.

The problem with government-led curriculum reform, along with related views about pedagogy and assessment, has been that Britain has been overly prescriptive, as noted by Power (2002), in order to 'Position subjects in ways that hark back to some imagined past, rather than forwards into more globalised times' (p. 103).

In other words, rather than accepting that in an information world knowledge itself will be beyond the capacity of the human brain, and that the important skills will be in evaluating and applying knowledge, successive governments from 1988 sought to narrow views of class and social position through a kind of constrained 'received wisdom' imposed through compulsory curricula and teaching methods. Aldrich et al (2000, p. 164) call this 'the renewed dominance of the old humanists and of a traditional academic culture'. Yet this position is proving as unsustainable as it is illogical and there are, just, the glimmerings of hope of a fresh approach, however grudging, even by officialdom. Thus Docking (2000, p. 81) notes that 'under subject headings [i.e. in the National Curriculum revisions] there are suggested links with other subjects and with ICT'. Even the government's own literature is, in guarded ways, suggesting that a more creative and less restrictive approach must be adopted, and is being adopted by the 'best primary schools':

Ofsted's new inspection framework ... requires inspectors to evaluate the extent to which curriculum provides a broad range of worthwhile curricular opportunities that caters for the interests, aptitudes and particular needs of all pupils. In **The Curriculum in Successful Primary Schools**, Ofsted explains this change in the context of encouraging schools to use their own professional judgements, and make full use of curriculum flexibilities, in order to take ownership of the curriculum ... Ofsted is actively encouraging a new culture of innovation ... (Department for Education and Skills, 2003, p. 25)

The same document takes the argument on a step further:

The focus will be on building teachers' capacity to manage really effective learning and teaching across the curriculum, rather than on presenting identikit blueprints for teaching. (p. 30)

Successive governments removed curriculum autonomy and flexible teaching; but let us be grateful for the small mercy that they are now beginning, belatedly, to hand these things back to the profession.

### Summary

This article has tried to establish: first, that the Plowden ideals of curriculum are relevant in the modern world; and second, that they are soundly based in both the groundwork of research and theory, and in the pragmatism of teachers' experience and classroom understandings. What is clear, in personal

conversation, is the increasing goodwill of a new generation of teachers to rediscover Plowden's ideas and ideals. They are disillusioned with today's prescriptions and yearn for the kind of autonomy that will convert their work back from that of hoop-jumping government technicians to independent-minded professionals. In fact, in this they mirror that other Plowden insight about children's learning (para. 1233): 'Finding out has proved better ... than being told'.

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**TREVOR KERRY** began his teaching career in London secondary modern schools, and moved on to a role in teacher education. He joined the Teacher Education Project in 1976, moving to Charlotte Mason College briefly in 1980 and then the Schools Council. He held posts in further education as teacher and senior manager; as a senior Local Education Authority adviser; and in the Open University. He returned to primary school teaching in the late 1990s before moving to the University of Lincoln's International Institute for Education Leadership. He is a prolific author of books, journal articles and journalism. *Correspondence:* Professor Trevor Kerry, Emeritus Professor in the University of Lincoln, 15 Lady Bower Close, North Hykeham, Lincoln LN6 8EX, United Kingdom ([tk.consultancy@virgin.net](mailto:tk.consultancy@virgin.net)).

# The Annabelle Dixon Fund

We mark with sadness a year since the passing of a dear friend and colleague Annabelle Dixon. Annabelle was an inspired and inspiring teacher and educationalist – a researcher and writer: contributor, campaigner and co-editor of *FORUM* - the journal for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education. She joined Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge, as the Times Educational Research Fellow in Educational Policy during a distinguished career in early years education. This spanned the domains of research, publication and the policy environment as well as the classroom she enjoyed so much. In the Lucy Cavendish newsletter of 2005, a piece on Annabelle concluded with the words 'her work continues' and this is demonstrably the case. In this time two books jointly authored by Annabelle have been chosen as the *Times Educational Supplement* Book of the Week. *Learning without Limits* was reviewed by Tim Brighouse, who declared that everyone in education should read it and consequently provided a copy for every school in the London Challenge.

Annabelle's classroom was, in the words of a friend, 'a place of genuine intellectual search.' As a psychologist and teacher she was committed to offering inspiring but grounded experiences to children as the essential basis for such a search. The second book, *First Hand Experience: what matters to children* is dedicated to Annabelle, who died while the book was in press. Tim Smit stated 'this book could save lives' and hosted a two day conference around the publication at the Eden project he created in Cornwall. A bursary scheme for teachers to attend was set up by the authors in Annabelle's memory.

A fund has now been set up at the College in Annabelle's name, with initial donations from three former fellows of Lucy Cavendish. Collectively we sought some way to continue the spirit of generosity, collegiality and intellectual curiosity that she encompassed. We propose to use this gift to establish an endowment fund to enable the College to make modest grants to students. In consultation with friends, family and colleagues it was decided to make an annual award to a student who has made the most of her time at Lucy Cavendish during that year.

**If you would like to make a donation to the fund please contact  
Head of Development at Lucy Cavendish,  
Meryl Davis ([mgd24@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mgd24@cam.ac.uk)) or  
Jane McGregor ([jane.mcgregor@educationresearch.co.uk](mailto:jane.mcgregor@educationresearch.co.uk))**